

Hamlet A Level Essay Questions

1. Examine Shakespeare's presentation of Claudius. Does he have any redeeming features or is he merely a '*damned smiling villain*'? (AEB English Literature 96)
2. Do you think that Hamlet is mad at any point of the play? (AEB English Literature 96)
3. What is Fortinbras's importance to the play as a whole? (AEB English Literature 97)
4. Look again at Act 3 Scene 4 which starts with Polonius: '*He will come straight. Look you lay home to him ...*' What effect do Hamlet's and Gertrude's words and actions in this scene have on your thoughts and feelings? (AEB English Literature 97)
5. Remind yourself of Ophelia's speech in Act 3 Scene 1, around line 150, beginning '*O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!*' and ending: '*I have seen what I have seen, see what I see!*' Using this speech as a starting point, comment on your response to Ophelia (what she says and what she does) both in this scene and in the play as a whole. (AEB English Literature 99)
6. Examine the ways in which Shakespeare presents and uses revenge in *Hamlet*. (AEB English Literature 99)
7. What does the theme of revenge contribute to the success of the play? (NEAB English Literature 95)
8. '*Those who betray Hamlet also betray themselves.*' Discuss. (NEAB English Literature 95)
9. How convincing do you find Shakespeare's presentation of the court at Elsinore, in terms of politics, manners and characterisation?
10. Though *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most famous and most popular tragedy, the tragic action is constantly disturbed by comedy or irrelevance and the protagonist is inadequate as a tragic hero. Do you find this a fair comment on the play?
11. Remind yourself of the final section of the play, from the entrance of Claudius, Laertes, and Gertrude. How satisfying an end do you find this?
12. '*The spirit that I have seen / May be a devil*'. Can we be quite sure about the ghost in *Hamlet*? What are your own conclusions on this matter?
13. '*This mad young man*'. How mad is the prince of Denmark?
14. '*Frailty, thy name is woman*'. How accurately may this description be applied to Gertrude and Ophelia?
15. Has Hamlet changed, at all, upon his return from England?
16. What different kinds of acting have you found in the play? What different purposes do these performances have?
17. How does Shakespeare build up to the climax of the play in Act 5 scene 2?
18. One critic has written of Claudius that he is 'a good king, but a bad man'. Is this true in your opinion?
19. Are the king's agents, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and Polonius, villains themselves?
20. Why does Hamlet delay his revenge?
21. Write about the dramatic effectiveness of scene x.
22. As he dies, Laertes says that he is '*justly killed*'. Do you agree with this opinion?
23. What does your reading of the play lead you to think about revenge? Account for your opinions carefully.
24. How does Shakespeare use imagery in the play to guide the responses of the audience?